

What Lies Ahead

by John R. Roberts, Colonel, USAF

As with any military member privileged to serve the Joint Information Operations Warfare Command, my time is finite, making this my closing message as Executive Editor of *IO Sphere*. Having worn a couple of hats, as Director of Intelligence and Director of Force Development, I've been fortunate to lead two exceptional teams, each of whom bring major contributions to our organizational successes. I've overseen analysts and subject matter experts building and distributing useful products to Joint and Service planners around the world. If you're a consumer of that work, I hope we've been helpful to you and your efforts. The journal you're reading is a somewhat different example of fusing experts and ideas, but I hope it continues to be of similar value. We've done our best to help construct a traditional written product that serves your professional interests, no matter what aspect of influence operations you're exploring.

During my tenure, we've tried to encourage a wide exchange of views, from a notable cross section of operators and scholars. I've let the editorial board run with a few items that generate strong discussion, or even controversy. I hope you share our views on the importance of providing an open forum for exchanging IO-related ideas. If we're doing things well, this journal enables you to better understand this broad spectrum of capabilities and competencies we call information operations. As this community continues to mature, we're receiving a greater number of essays and think pieces from even more diverse contributors. Authors don't just talk about finding the right part of the electromagnetic spectrum, or how to keep an adversary from piecing together our intentions, they also address the importance of both our forces and our diplomats speaking with a single voice.

This command was among the first to embrace the concept of 'full-spectrum IO,' adopting a holistic view of how to put ideas and capabilities together. Recent campaign experience, evolving doctrine, new lessons learned, all serve to strengthen application of IO in the real world. It's been a privilege to contribute, and to serve this noble mission.

-- JRR

From the IO Front

by Douglas S. Marrs, Lieutenant Colonel, USA

Once upon a time in Afghanistan: Taliban spokesman Mawauli Latifola Hakimi was winning perception skirmishes in the open press. For example, he would fax releases claiming downed aircraft and Coalition deaths when a helo would do a precautionary shut down in the field. The press cut and pasted his releases into their stories, making it appear we were constantly losing men and material. No one countered Hakimi's actions.

After about 30 days as CJSOTF-Afghanistan Deputy J3, I was angry that this propaganda continued to spew. I asked PAO Major X (names withheld) to issue refutations of TB releases. The response: "PAO doesn't do IO or propaganda." I went to the CJTF IO chief Major Y and retold my sad tale. He was slightly more help, noting "Well, that's the PAO, what are you going to do?" He meant it as a rhetorical device, signaling capitulation. Crestfallen and agitated, I recounted my misadventures to my J3. He gave me the best possible advice: "Do whatever you need to do to smoke this guy." I called in reinforcements from other PAOs, and used a 'secret' technique: I read PA doctrine and PA Guidance.

The Plan: Step 1. Issue 'setting the record straight' (STRS) releases; Step 2. CFC-A PAO briefs them at his daily stand up; Step 3. Repeat until Hakimi is discredited. Simple, right? Can you guess the biggest obstacles: Major X the PAO; a CFC-A PAO spokesman; and perhaps most significantly, the CFC-A Chief of Staff. PAG for CFC-A was passive, response to query. But PA doctrine allows STRS releases, even with a passive PAG—and a PAO who refused to issue such 'propaganda.' I said, "No it is counter propaganda, a key PA doctrinal tenant." But the CFC-A spokesman preferred passive PAG. The CFC-A CoS was not a risk taker, and wouldn't force either to participate. Yet, a coup took place as the CFC-A spokesman was slowly eased out, the CoS replaced, and I started issuing press releases over the objections of all the above mentioned impediments. By now I was CJSOTF-A/J5, able to fully integrate all IO elements into our operations.

The Results: the campaign against the TB spokesman slowly manifested its success as qualifiers in wire stories like, 'unconfirmed' or 'sometimes incorrect claims by TB spokesman.' The cherry on top came as a story quoting Hakimi mentioned a rocket attack at a time that hadn't happened yet. I alerted our teams, and they addressed some targets: an enemy rocket team got smoked. I issued the most poignant STRS release to date, thanking the TB spokesman for the warning and reporting six to seven dead rocketeers, plus several secondary explosions. Hakimi made mistakes—and we rolled him up. The reward for my unconventional behaviors: one official was so upset that an IO guy was PA spokesman, he issued a letter condemning my activities. -- DSM

The lesson, fellow IO practitioners, is "Git 'er done."

[LTC Doug Marrs currently serves in the JIOWC PACOM Division]